

Italiano Chiaro

Top 5 Cultural Differences Americans Should Know Before Moving to Italy

1. Time Moves Slower in Italy

In Italy, the concept of time and urgency isn't the same as it is in the U.S. Things simply take longer here, and people aren't always in a rush to get things done. For example, if you're waiting for a service or an appointment, expect to be patient—it's common to experience delays or relaxed attitudes.

Why This Matters: Many Americans who move to Italy find it difficult to adjust to this slower pace and feel frustrated when things don't happen "on time." In Italy, valuing time with people and enjoying the present often outweighs strict schedules.

Example: If you plan to meet someone for coffee, don't expect it to be a 15-minute chat. Italians often see social outings as chances to connect deeply, and these can last an hour or more.

2. Meals Are for Enjoyment, Not Just Fuel

In Italy, food is a social experience meant to be enjoyed, not rushed. Meal times are typically longer, with lunch and dinner taking at least an hour or more, and often including multiple courses.

Tips to Adapt: When dining out, avoid asking for the check immediately after finishing your meal—this is seen as rude. Italians generally linger after eating to talk, relax, and digest.

Common Mistake: Newcomers may feel uncomfortable with the length of meals and often leave quickly, missing the chance to connect. Accepting this slow-paced dining experience is essential for building relationships.

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3. Personal Space is Smaller

In Italy, people tend to stand closer to each other during conversations, and physical touch is more common. Handshakes, cheek kisses, and even gentle touches on the arm are normal, even in casual encounters.

Why This Can Feel Uncomfortable: For Americans used to more personal space, this can feel invasive. However, these gestures are simply part of Italian friendliness and warmth.

Tip: Try to embrace this cultural norm and remember that Italians use closeness to convey warmth and connection. If you step back frequently, it can signal discomfort or even disinterest.



4. Bureaucracy is Part of Life

From setting up bank accounts to getting residency permits, bureaucracy in Italy is notoriously slow and complex. Many processes require in-person visits to government offices, and paperwork can take weeks, if not months, to complete.

Important Reminder: Come prepared with the right documents, as one missing item can mean an extra trip to the office. This is especially true for getting a codice fiscale, Italy's tax code, which is essential for signing leases, opening bank accounts, and even getting a SIM card.

Common Pitfall: Many Americans expect online or digital processes and get frustrated with Italy's reliance on face-to-face meetings and paperwork. Instead, plan to be patient and accept that things will not always run efficiently.

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5. Respect for Tradition and Hierarchy

Italy has a deep respect for tradition, and in many places, seniority and hierarchy are respected in both social and professional settings. Elders are often given priority in decision-making, and established methods are followed closely.

How This Affects You: Whether at work or in social groups, it's good to acknowledge and respect this hierarchy. Younger Americans may feel that their ideas aren't valued immediately, but showing respect to elders and longtime residents can go a long way.

Example: At a family gathering, it's typical for elders to be served first, and their opinions are usually considered before others'. Observing these practices is a way to show respect and integrate smoothly.



Ready to Make the Move Smoother?

Adjusting to a new culture can be a big transition, and learning Italian will help you feel more connected and confident in your new home. My courses at Italiano Chiaro are designed specifically for those moving to Italy, with practical lessons on language, culture, and essential tips for daily life. Join me to start speaking Italian with ease and make your new life in Italy an unforgettable experience.